

Section 18

Involvement— the vital ingredient

Guiding Faculty

Albert Dorne, Founder
[1904-1965]

Norman Rockwell
Al Parker
Ben Stahl
Stevan Dohanos
Jon Whitcomb
Robert Fawcett
Peter Helck
Austin Briggs
Harold Von Schmidt
George Giusti
Fred Ludekens
Bernard Fuchs
Bob Peak
Tom Allen
Lorraine Fox
Franklin McMahon

Ben Shahn
Doris Lee
Dong Kingman
Arnold Blanch
Adolf Dehn
Fletcher Martin
Will Barnet
Syd Solomon
Jullan Levi
Joseph Hirsch

Milton Caniff
Al Capp
Dick Cavalli
Whitney Darrow, Jr.
Rube Goldberg
Harry Haenigsen
Willard Mullin
Virgil Partch
Barney Tobey



“You’ve gotta have heart . . .”

The title of this page is a line from a song — a parody on pep talks and sentimental motivations. Like most clichés, however, the statement is rooted in truth.

To achieve anything, you do have to have heart. So before you investigate this section, think again about *personal commitment*, the cornerstone of all art.

You’ve been acquiring and practicing skills. You’ve discovered a variety of mediums; you have a knowledge of how to arrange elements in your pictures, and you’ve developed an eye for color and shapes. You’re more sensitive, more aware of your surroundings. But the most important asset you can have is your ability to become *involved*. That involvement can answer your questions about what directions your art should take: you must care about whatever you draw, paint or construct.

Do you love flowers? If you do, you’ve probably grown some. You’ve read books about them; you know how sunlight, insects, fertilizers affect them.

Are you interested in judo? Then doubtlessly you know the word implies “gentle touch.” Maybe you love old cars, or brand-new ones. If you do, you’ve looked at their engines; you know how they work, not just what they look like.

We’re not saying you should plant a lilac bush and wait for it to blossom before you paint it, or that you should become a black-belt champion. We are saying that *caring* about your creations makes the vital difference between a superficial resemblance and a work of art.

It’s been noted that “It isn’t what is painted or how it is painted that matters; what matters is who paints it.” In every work of art there is a personal style, a “handwriting” that proclaims its creator. You would never mistake a Van Gogh for a Rembrandt; you can tell the difference between a Seurat and a Jackson Pollock. Yet all these men, and other great artists, share one quality: passionate concern.

Your style, too, will evolve naturally, as a matter of course, if you concentrate on making honest, deeply felt artistic statements. Keep on investigating and finding possibilities within yourself — some you might not even suspect.

Remember that whatever you create is uniquely yours. Whenever you pick up your pencil, pen, or brush you’ll begin to make something that never was before and never will be again — *if* you really care about it.

Now turn the page and find out more about involvement from . . .

Stevan Dohanos

Stevan Dohanos discovered long ago that it's necessary for the artist to become deeply absorbed by his subjects. Every work of art he creates is the result of his involvement with things — most of which are ignored or given no more than a passing thought by most people.

If he paints a broom, he shows it with splayed fibers; anyone looking at it knows at once he's seeing a handy, useful tool. The street signs in Dohanos' pictures show how their paint has been chipped away; they have rust marks made by rain and snow. He loves to portray a homely loaf of bread, with its dark-brown crust flaking under the knife.

Once Dohanos wanted to paint a scene that included a fire hydrant. Before he even picked up a pencil, he found out all he could about hydrants. He learned that there are different styles of plugs in different communities; he interviewed firemen, he discovered how and where various hydrants are made, he went to fires and saw plugs being used. Then he began painting them. He takes the same pains with all of the everyday things most of us accept casually.

If you believe, as Dohanos does, that you can make artistic statements by showing things man has invented, made and used, learn about the things and the people who created them. Track down information about the objects like a big-game hunter.

"Painting a prosaic object requires as much skill as painting a portrait of a beautiful woman," says Dohanos. It takes as much knowledge and thinking, too, and it can be a lifetime interest. This source of subject material never ends.



Faculty member Stevan Dohanos, shown here beside one of the rural "common objects" he collects and cherishes.

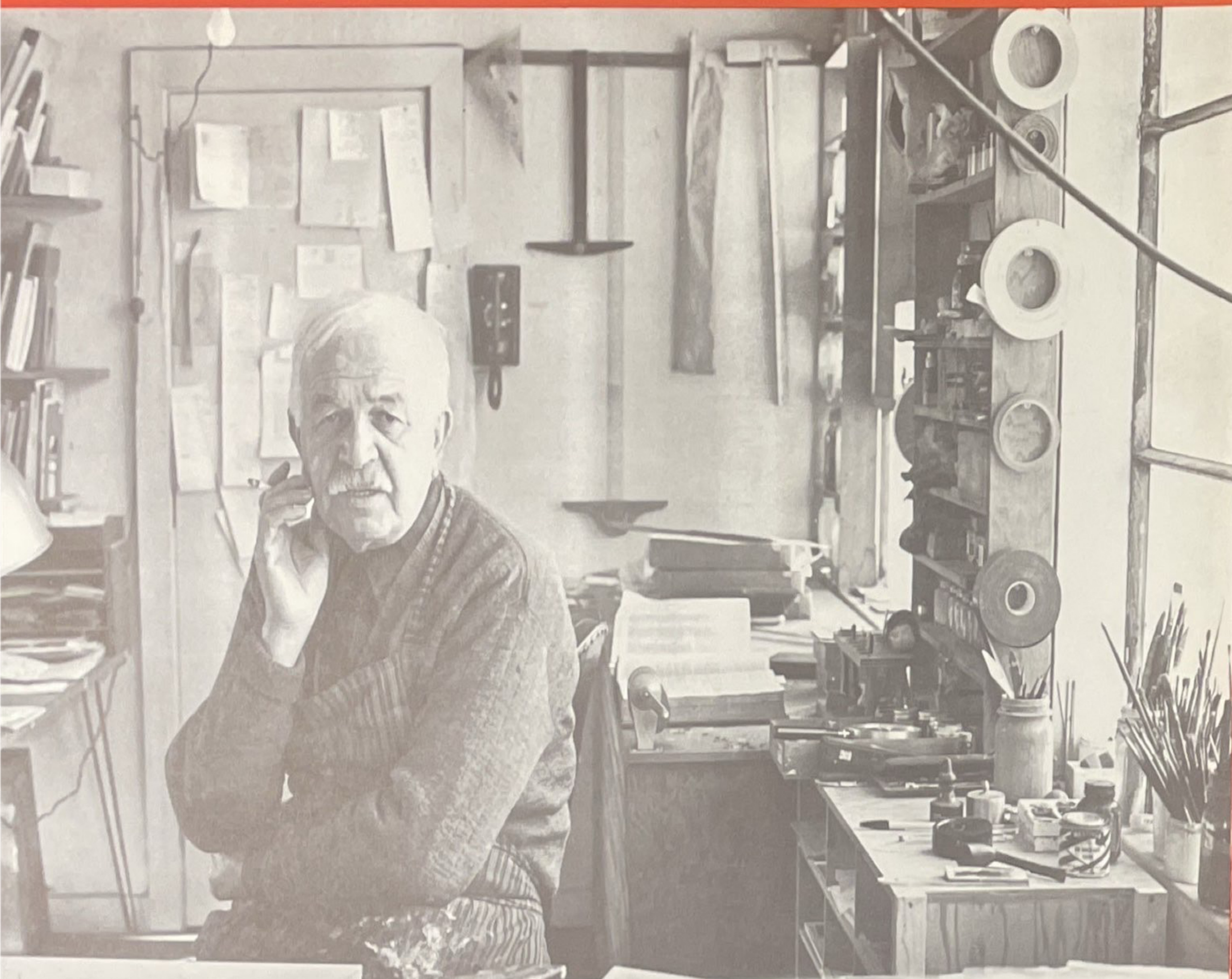
Ben Shahn

...you've already met. He's a great craftsman because he has developed his natural gifts; he's a great artist because he has a passionate concern with humanity.

We've all met people who are all talk, no action. The Chinese have a saying about them: "Big noise on stairs, but nobody coming down." But Ben Shahn is certainly not one of those: time and again, he has "come down the stairs."

He has dared consistently to act on behalf of the helpless: victims of injustice in the twenties, people who went hungry during the Great Depression of the thirties, those who suffered from the horrors of war in the forties, and the Japanese fishermen who were showered by atomic fallout on their mis-named boat, *The Lucky Dragon*, during the fifties. In Shahn's art, he makes the human condition visible.

Photograph by Hans Namuth



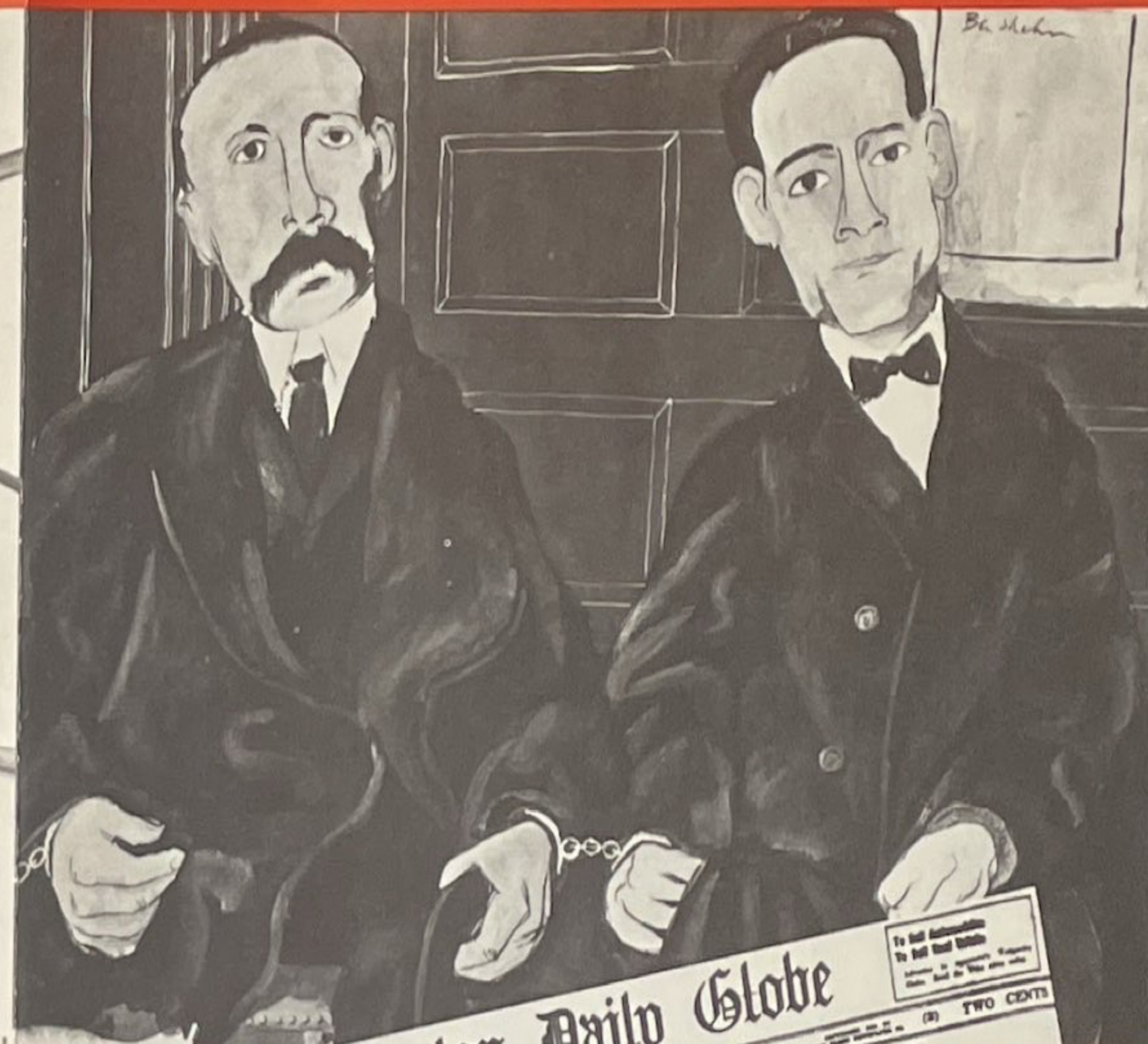
The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti, 1931-32. Tempera on canvas, 84 1/2" x 48".
Ben Shahn
Collection Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
Gift of Edith and Milton Lowenthal in memory of Juliana Force

Shahn once said, "I hate injustice. Ever since I could remember I'd wished I'd been lucky enough to be alive at that great time—when something big was going on, like the Crucifixion. Suddenly I realized I was. Here I was living through another crucifixion. Here was something to paint."

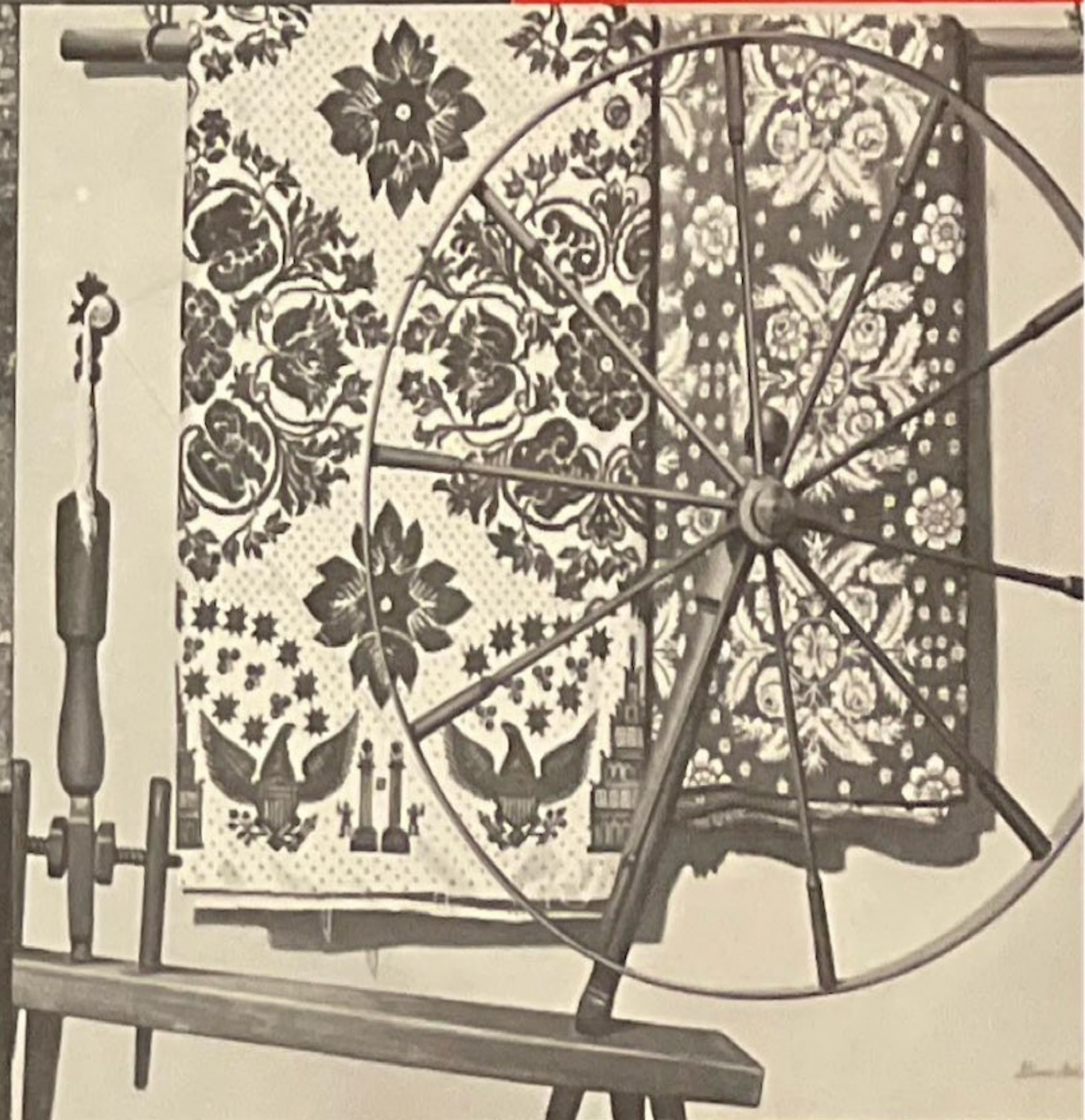
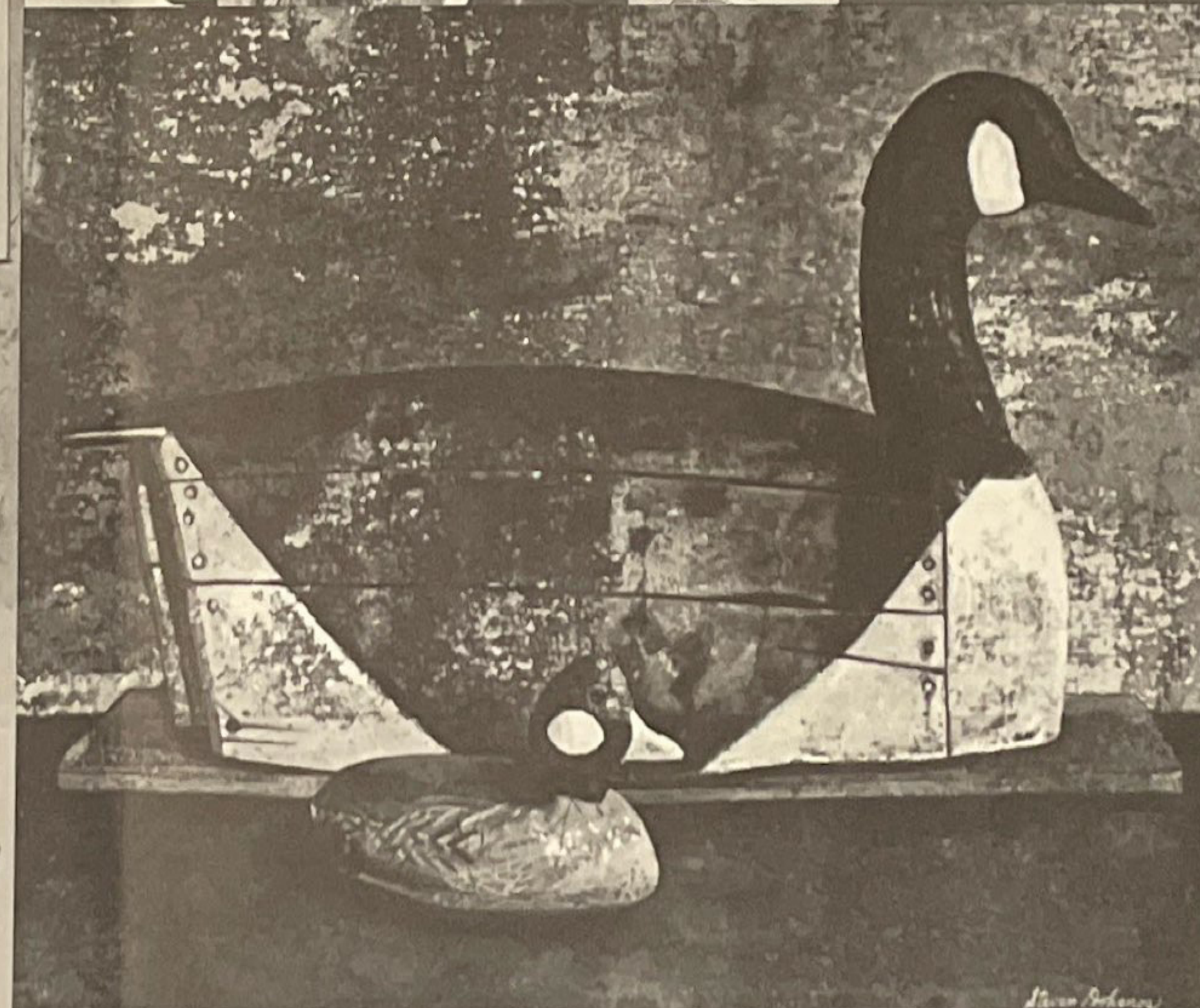
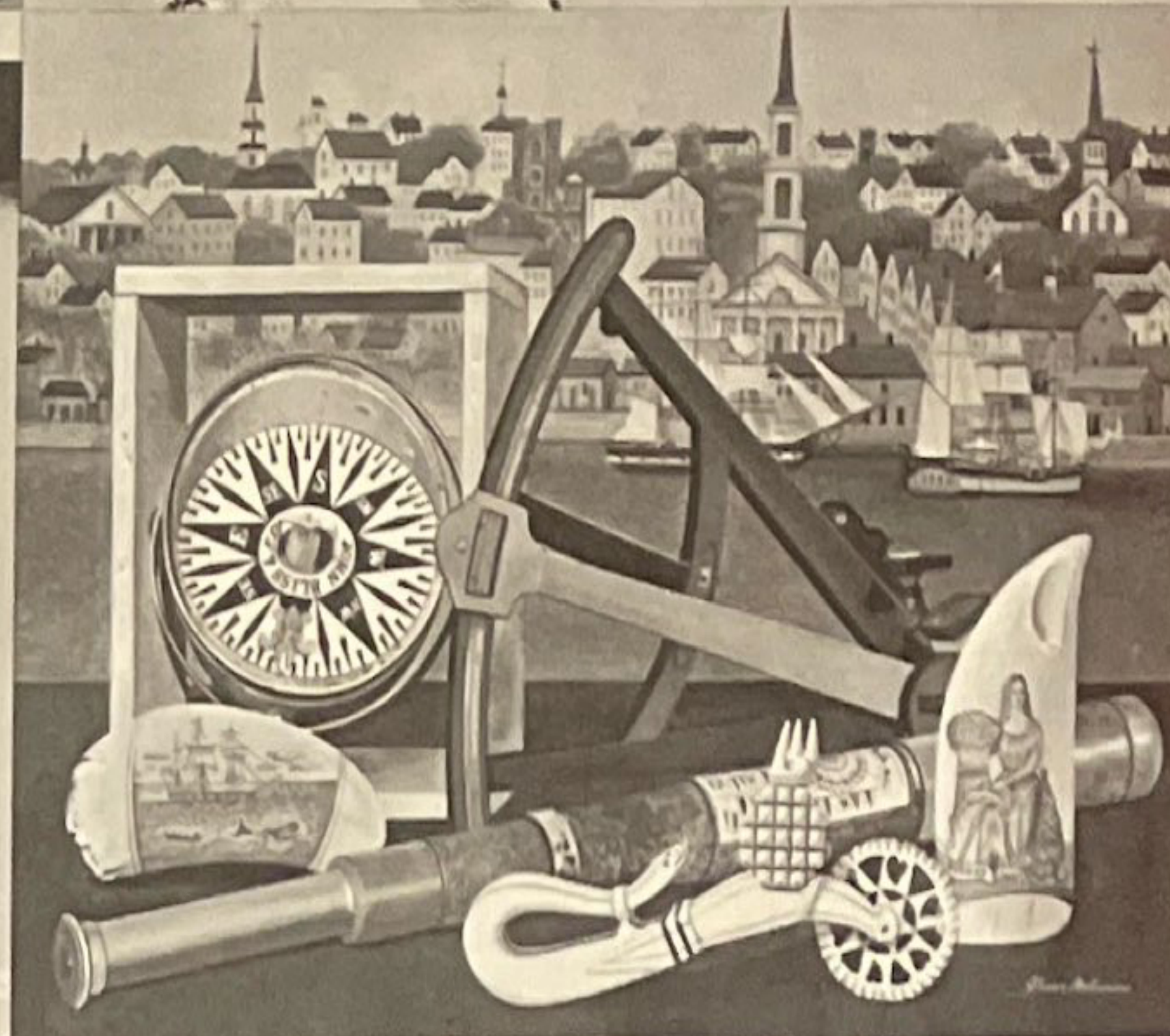
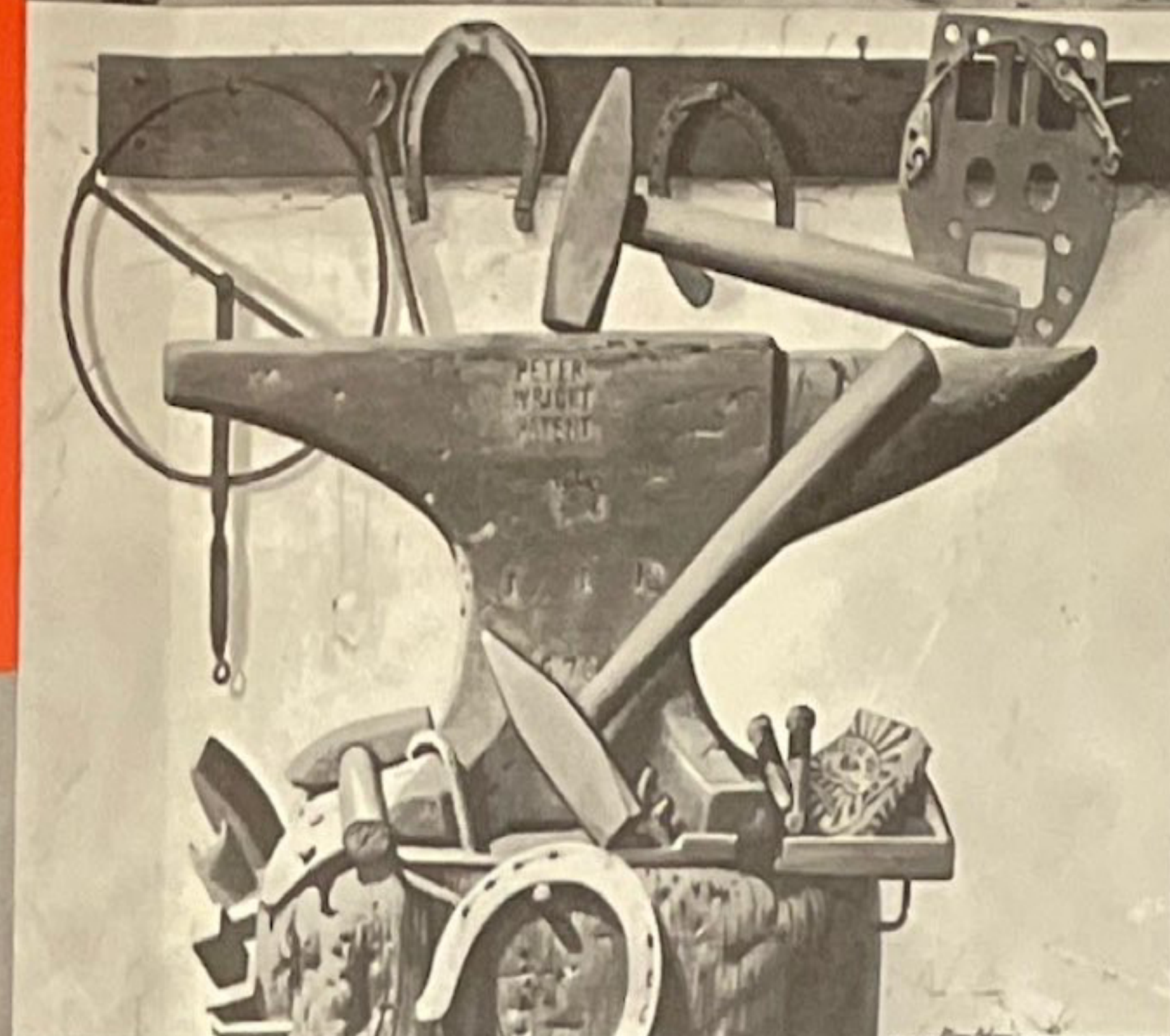
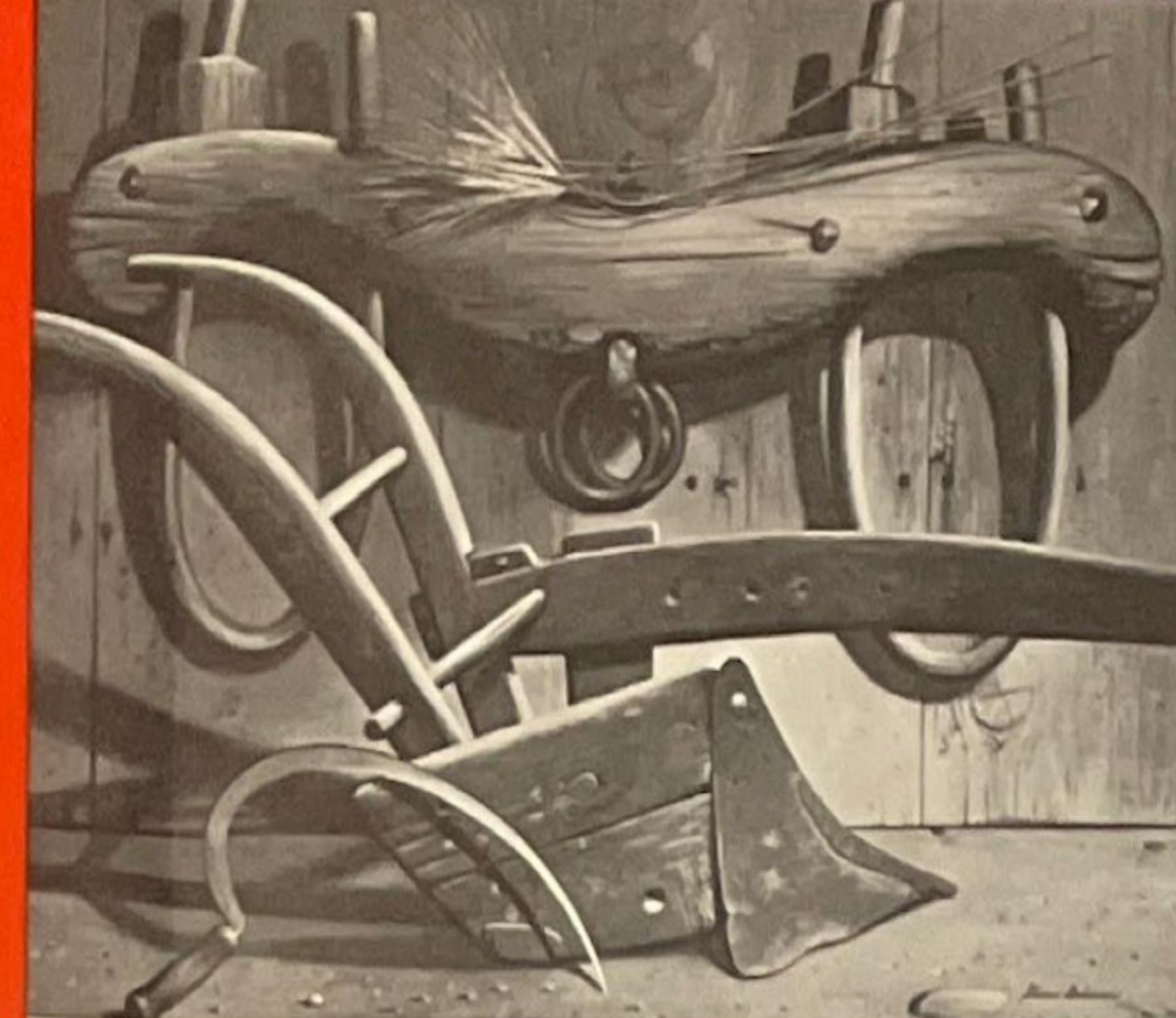
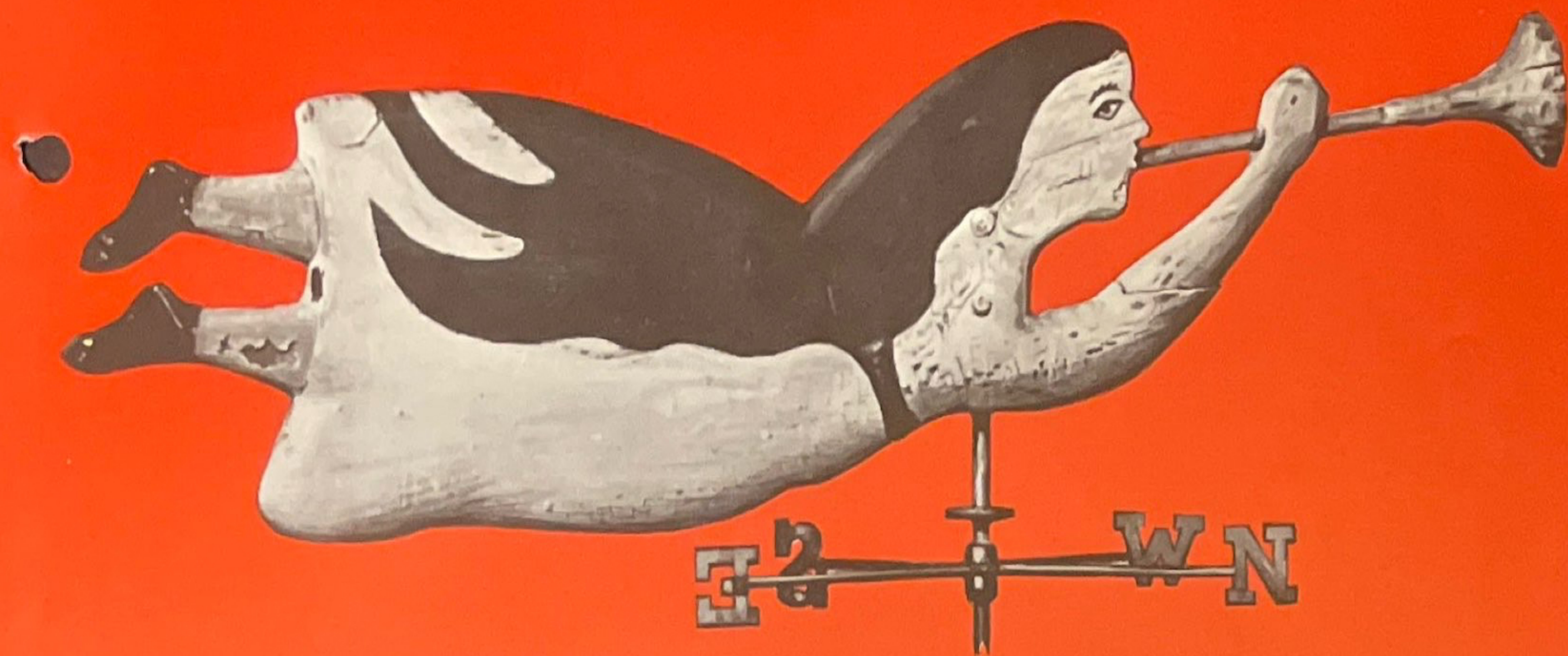
He was talking about Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, a shoemaker and a fish peddler who had been tried and sentenced to death in 1921. Many people to this day feel they were sent to the electric chair for their politics rather than for the crime they were charged with—a payroll robbery and the murder of two guards.

During the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti, Shahn made twenty-three gouache paintings of the principals and other figures

Bartolomeo Vanzetti and Nicola Sacco, Ben Shahn
Collection The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Gift of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller



Demonstration in Paris, Ben Shahn
Collection Mr. Elmer Rice
Courtesy The Downtown Gallery, New York



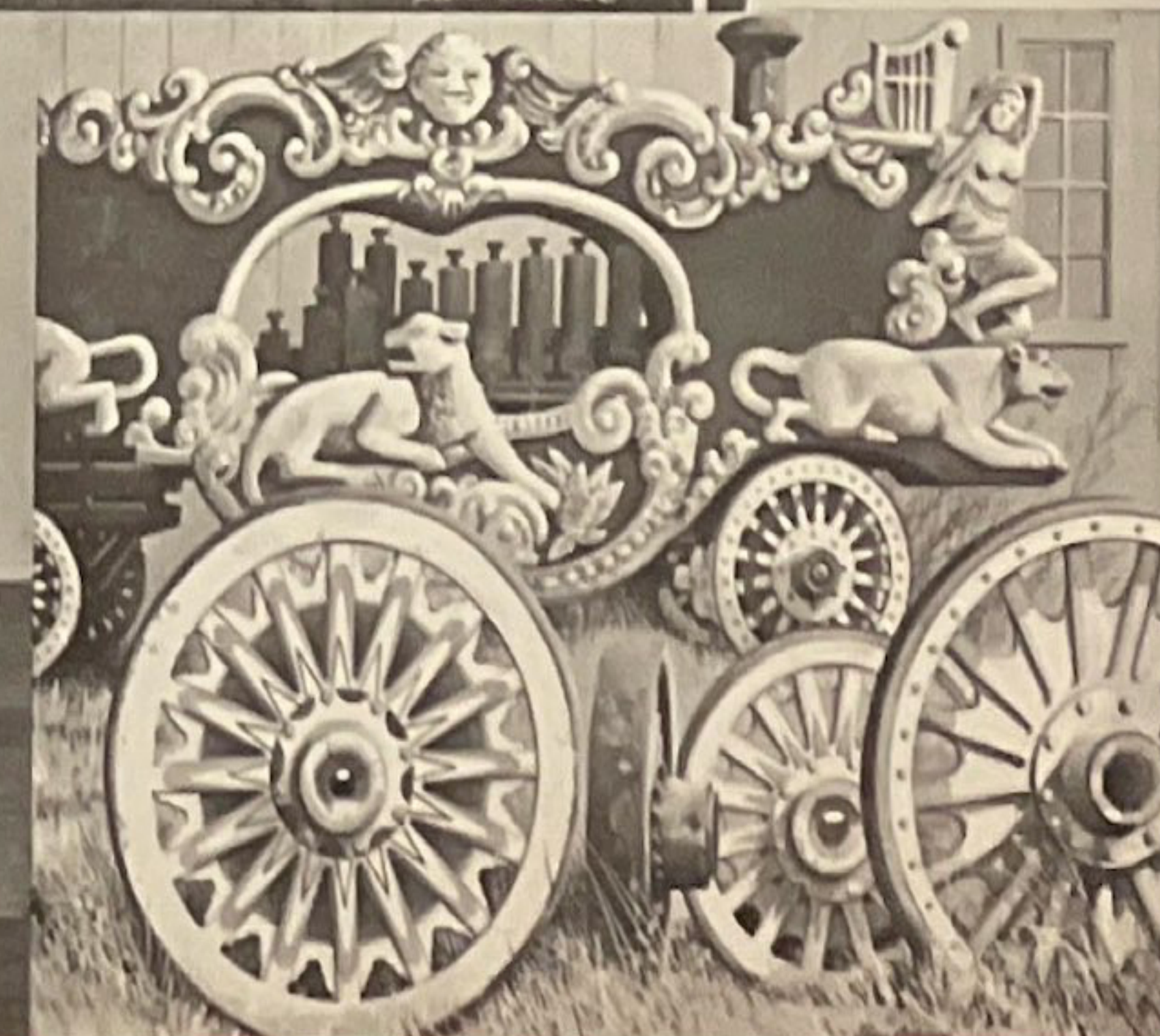
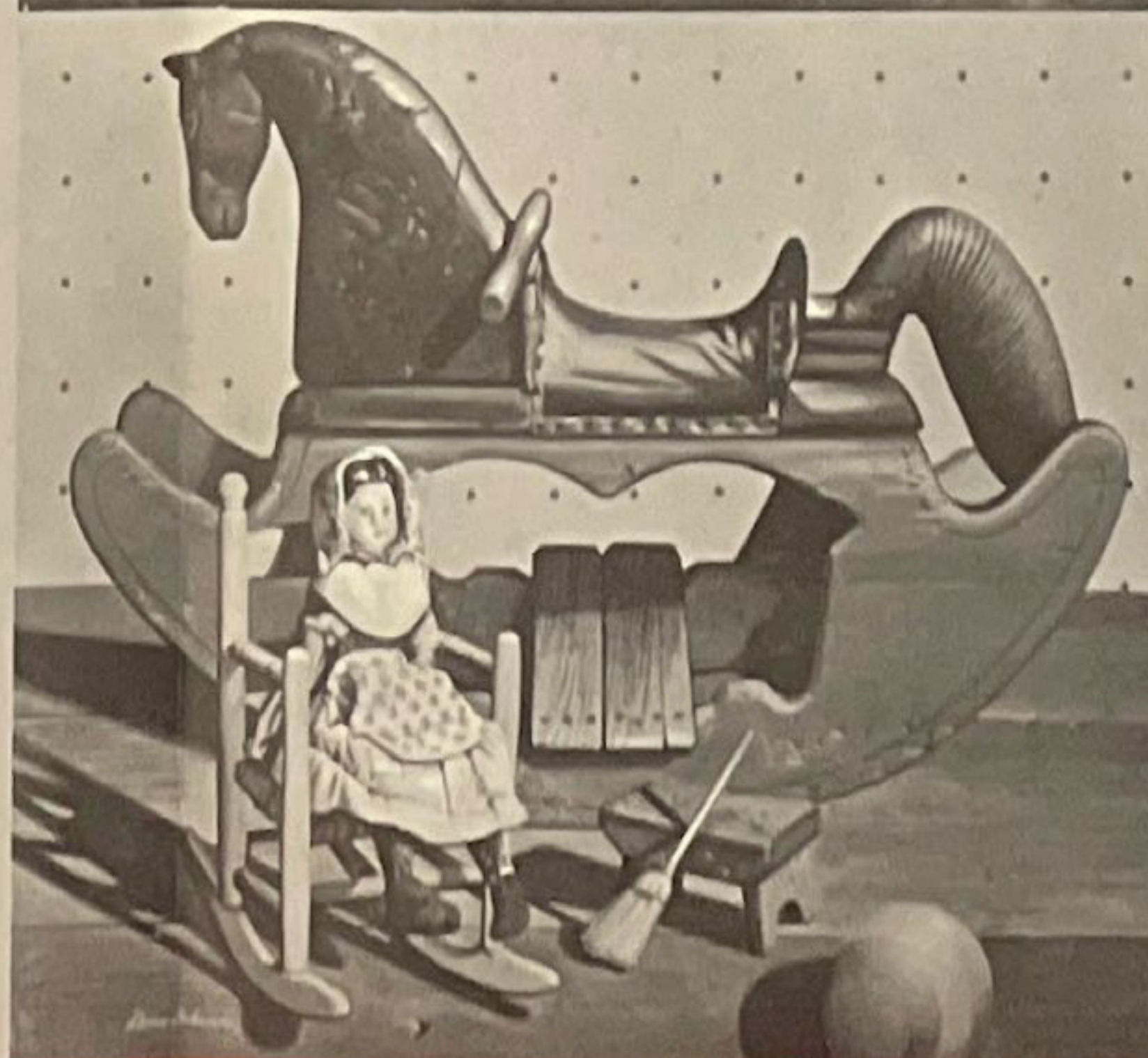
On these pages are some of the paintings that represent but one facet of Dohanos' fascination with things: the artist is very attracted by early Americana. He wanted to paint pictures of some of the possessions of our early settlers, so he visited the great museums where the objects are displayed. Dohanos handled primitive, handmade things — tools, fabrics and toys. He studied them; he read about them. He knows what they are used for, why they were needed, who made them and when.

At one museum the artist was offered many exquisitely carved, perfectly preserved decoys as painting subjects. But he wasn't satisfied with any of them. He kept searching until he found one that showed the effect of use, time, and the elements.

Dohanos couldn't have made such paintings without feeling a love and respect for the people who created these objects so many years ago.

Study these pictures. Let them make you enthusiastic; discover the artistic possibilities in the treasures of our past and the commonplace things of today. Reflect on the qualities in the things you paint. They are not dull, lifeless nothings; they were endowed with meaning and spirit by the craftsmen who made them and the people who used them. Your paintings can show their relevancy to their times — if you care about the objects, as Dohanos does.

Now turn this page and find out more about a man whom . . .



in the case. After six years of legal appeals, the two men were executed in August of 1927. Shahn's involvement with them continued; he kept on making drawings and paintings that insisted, "This isn't justice."

On these pages you see only a few of the works that resulted from Shahn's concern with the rights of the individual. There are sympathy, compassion, anger — involvement — in all of them.

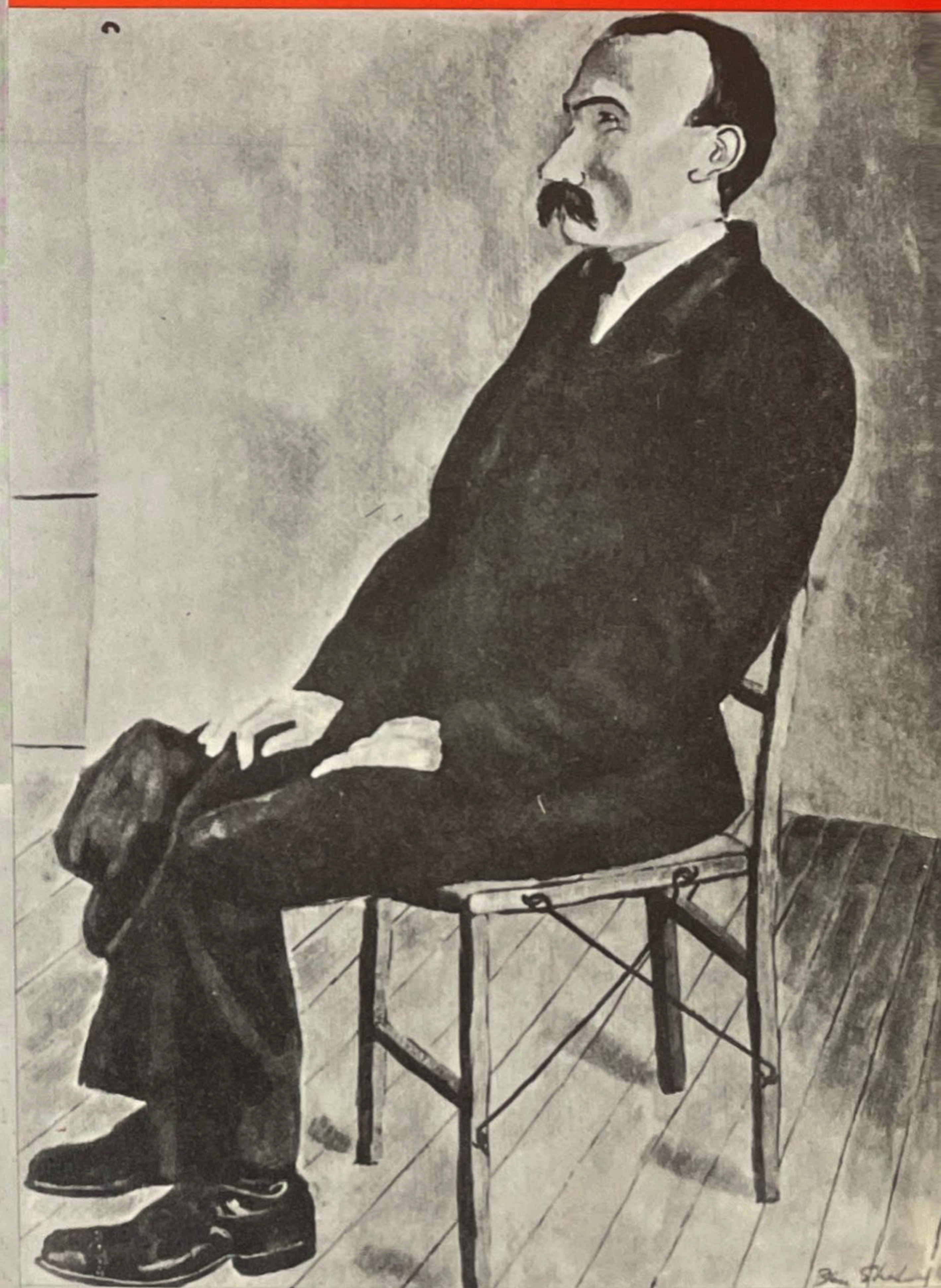
And now, many years later, Shahn is designing a glass and marble mosaic mural for a building at the University of Syracuse — and the theme is the trial of Sacco and Vanzetti. The artist is gratified that there is still interest in the two men and in the creations that were the beginnings of his career.

If you have a concern for social problems, moral issues, let Shahn's example inspire you to make your convictions visible in your art.

Bartolomeo Vanzetti and Nicola Sacco and Their Guards, Ben Shahn
Collection Miss Patricia Healey
Courtesy The Downtown Gallery, New York



Bartolomeo Vanzetti, Ben Shahn
Collection Mrs. Edith Gregor Halpert
Courtesy The Downtown Gallery, New York



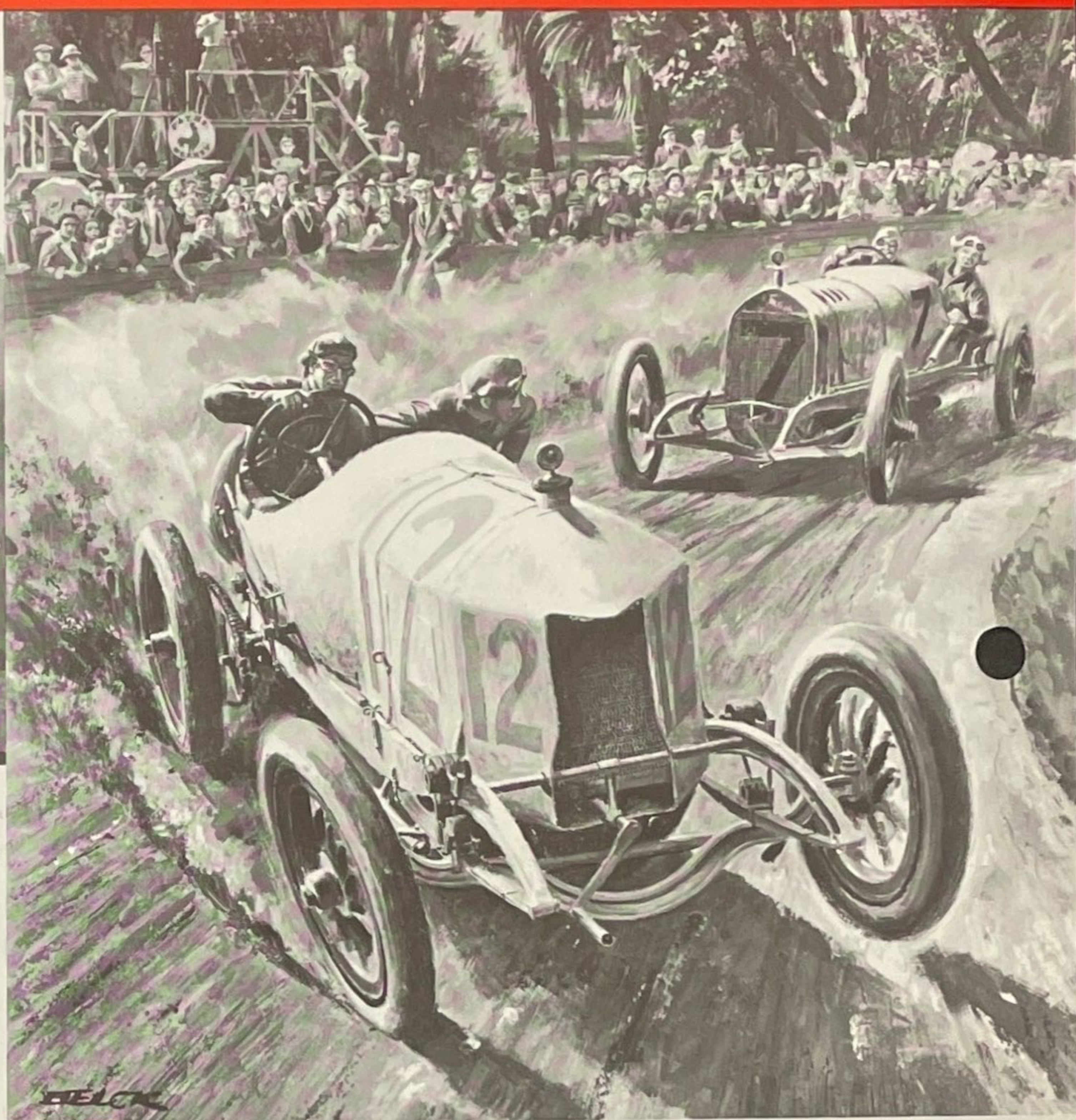
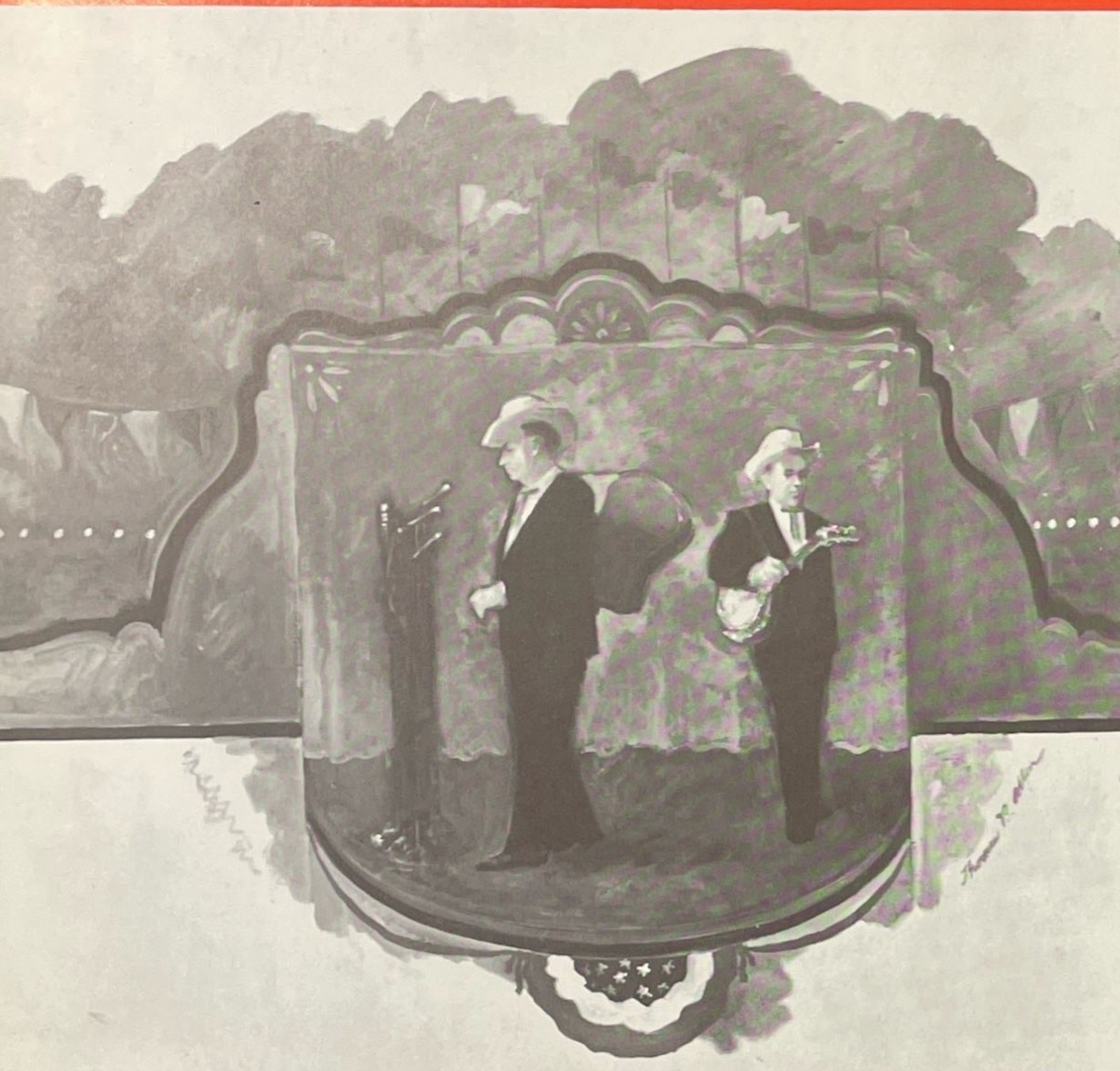
Sacco and Vanzetti, Ben Shahn
Courtesy Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University
Gift of Meta and Paul J. Sachs

"If it had not been for these things, I might have lived out my life talking at street corners to scornful men. I might have died, unmarked, unknown, a failure. Now we are not a failure. This is our career and our triumph. Never in our full life could we hope to do such work for tolerance, for justice, for man's understanding of man as now we do by accident. Our words — our lives — our pains — nothing! The taking of our lives — lives of a good shoemaker and a poor fish peddler — all! That last moment belongs to us — that agony is our triumph." — Bartolomeo Vanzetti

This album cover is one of a series painted by Faculty member Tom Allen for the records of Flatt and Scruggs. The success of the paintings is due largely to the artist's having an understanding and feeling for the men and their music — he plays country and Western music himself. "A new world opened to me and the center of it was Earl Scruggs," says Allen. "I gave him one of the paintings; he gave me a banjo."

DePalma Swung Wide
Courtesy True magazine
© 1949, Fawcett Publications

Here's a scene by Peter Helck. He's a racing enthusiast; he owns several racing cars. When he's not driving them, he's painting them — and others: Helck has written and illustrated a book, *The Checkered Flag*, about auto racing. His love for the cars and the sport is certainly implicit in his paintings.



Courtesy of Columbia Records

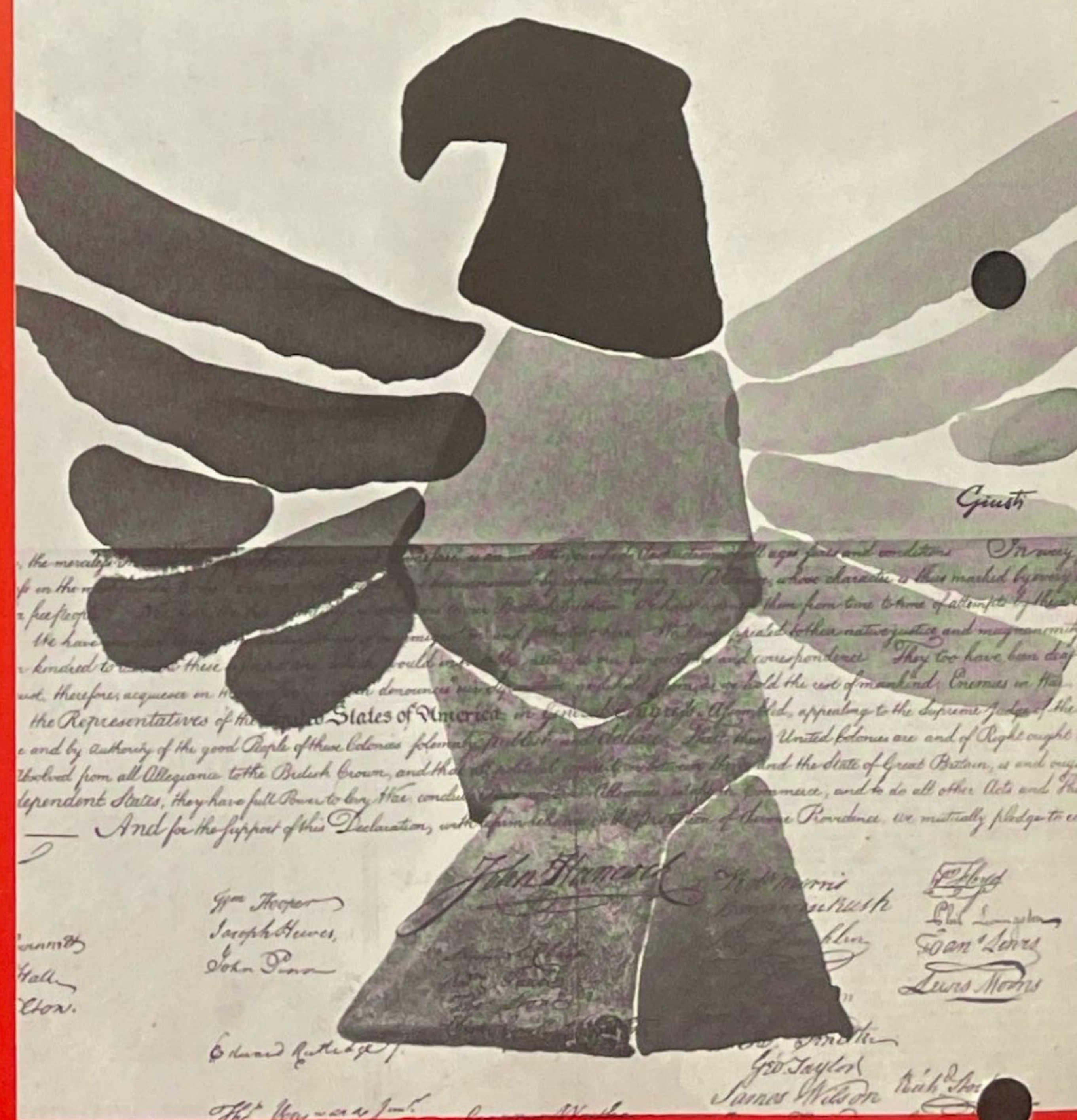
And other artists

The works of art on these pages range from realistic paintings to pure abstract expressionism. What they have in common is that they were all created by artists who worked in depth, researched, knew and loved their subjects.

Everybody has special interests; they are largely what make each of us an individual. And the artist is endowed with gifts which enable him to express his involvements in his own way.

Nobody has ever painted birds so well as Audubon — because his paintings represent not just a surface likeness but his love of every kind of bird. Josef Albers, a renowned colorist, devoted much of his career to exploring the artistic possibilities in the square — he found they were infinite.

Art has been described as a "storehouse of recorded values." The men represented here have all contributed to that storehouse. Their creations are valued because they put their minds and hearts into them.



© 1962, The Curtis Publishing Company

This cover for *Holiday* is by George Giusti, an artist you met in Sections 11 and 12. He spends weeks just thinking out his approach before he tackles any assignment. That's one of the reasons why his creations are instantly recognizable. "I tried a little bit of everything before I found that what I do is what I like best," says Giusti.



Cliché
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

All his life, Stuart Davis was involved in cityscapes. Early in his career, he painted realistically. But with the years, his style became more and more abstract. His "color shapes" were arrived at by reducing objects to their essence. This painting is an expression of the artist's reaction to the vigorous pace of big-city life.

This figure drawing is by Robert Fawcett, who was known as the illustrator's illustrator. All his creations have a vivid authenticity, because he believed in drawing "freely, constantly, searchingly, lovingly; forever drawing, because the more one draws the more he will see."

From *On The Art of Drawing*
Courtesy Watson-Guption Publications

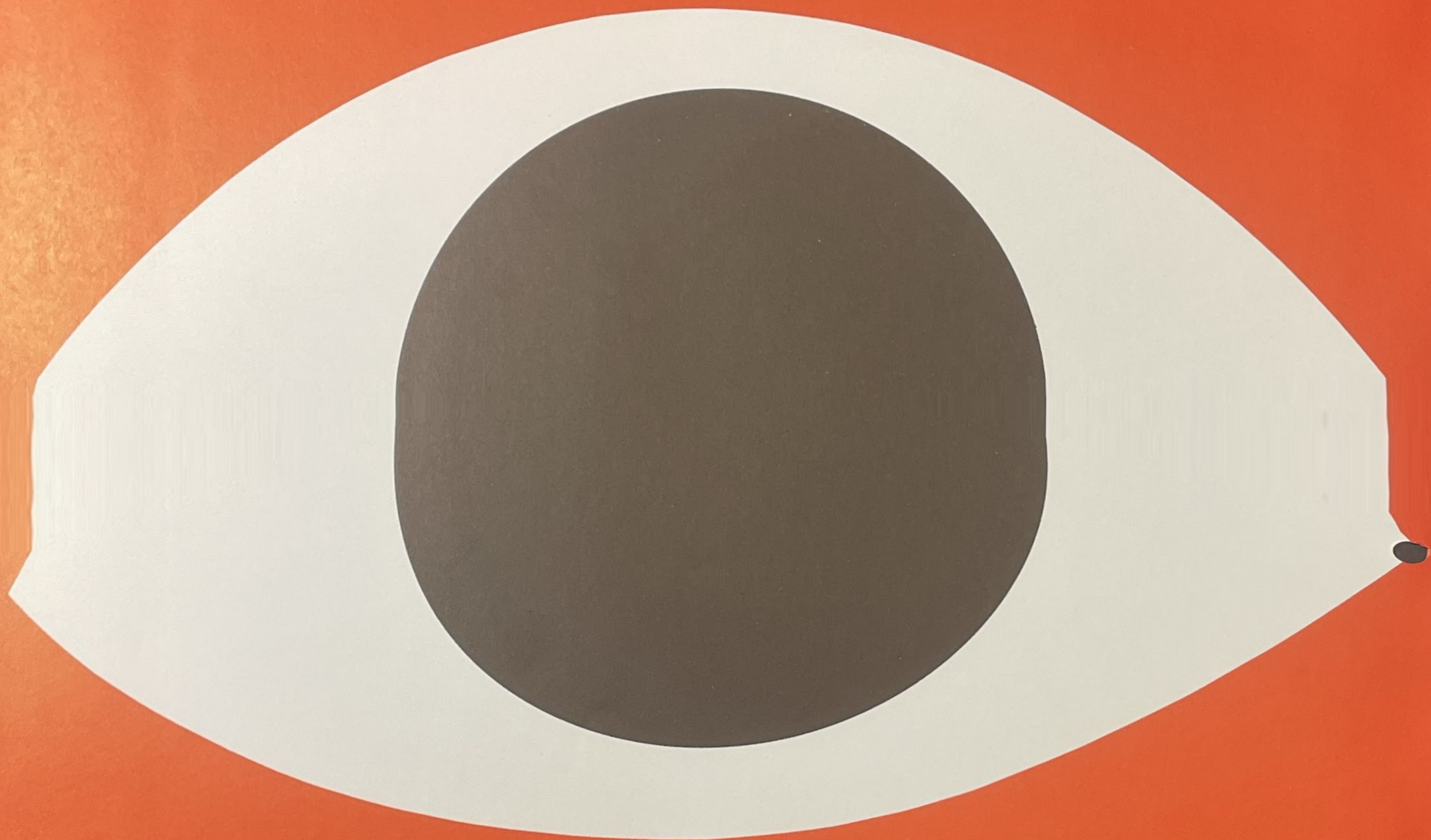


Harold Von Schmidt can make the scenes of our West visible as no other modern artist can. Through research and personal experience, he has been able to put into his drawings and paintings not only what he sees but what he feels. The artist has lived among the Indians, he has taken part in their tribal ceremonies, he knows their customs, even the kind of ponies ridden by the various tribes.



Roseover
Collection of Mr. V. Henry Rothchild

This painting is by Syd Solomon. The endless variety in nature excites him and he continually paints from the inspirations he gets from water, rocks, flowers, sand, coral. But he translates his reactions to all these things into pure abstract expressions. As he says, he is more interested in portraying the *illusion* of texture than the actual rise and fall in surfaces.



Who do you think you are?

Now that you've almost reached the end of the Course, take a look at yourself. What have you learned about art? Most important, what have you really enjoyed in your work with us?

That might be easier to answer if you look back over the Course and remember which sections stand out as being really special for you. Was one the animal lesson? Drawing the human figure? What about portrait painting? Working with color? Design? Or maybe you didn't really lose yourself until you got to the experiments you've just been doing with methods and materials you'd never heard of before.

Artists draw their inspiration from whatever parts of life intrigue them most, and we hope you will, too. By that we don't mean that you have to find a visible subject that you like, and then put it on canvas. The aspect of life that in-



terests you most can come from any corner — even one that's hidden deep inside your imagination. You may be a tactile artist, concerned with the feel, the textural quality of your work. Color — just the delight of color — may be your direction, or it may be construction or design. Whatever you find that absorbs your interest will determine the way you will go.

Of course, your focus may change as you make new discoveries in your work as an artist, as you grow and change. That is fine, as long as you try to involve yourself in everything you do. If you don't, it will show. As an artist, you learn to look and see with keen awareness, but when you put something on canvas your picture becomes a unique blending of what you see and who you are. It's the involvement of *yourself* that gives your work life.

"Speaking of art..."



If you are original, you don't think about originality. If you feel something intensely, and you say it with enough energy, it becomes original. It belongs to you, and it is you.

— Will Barnet

If a student practices over and over doing what he can do and not what he can't do, he doesn't make much progress. But if he tries to reach for something different he will grow as an artist. I never look for a scene that will be easy (or for that matter, difficult). I look for something I have a personal interest in and then try to make it come off.

— Austin Briggs

The tendency is to see the conventional thing. You should always look at something as if you had never seen it before. After a period of penetrating observation, the same subject can begin to take on different aspects. This is what I have described as "becoming dizzy with looking."

— Robert Fawcett

Of course you should get personally involved with the picture. You have to search if something doesn't hit you personally. Then you have to search for that involvement. And it may not be there.

— Bernard Fuchs

I don't think you can worry about what is an interesting subject to paint. You have to find it for yourself. You might go out tomorrow and see a terrific subject in the branch of a tree. Perhaps you hadn't noticed it before. You can't force this kind of thing, but it will come if you work all the time at your painting.

— Arnold Blanch

I don't think I "see" the final painting before I start. The minute you put anything down you must make the next element relate to the first. It's always a surprise — sometimes a shock or a pleasure. (I think I paint best when I am completely relaxed and the picture just develops.)

— Doris Lee

Lorraine Fox

Stevan Dohanos

Syd Solomon

Robert Peak

Will Barnett

Five Faculty Voices
A record from the
Famous Artists Course for
Talented Young People

When I go through the material I have gathered on a trip and pick up any sketch at random, I can feel the weather, smell the smells, hear the sounds that were there because I made it, no matter how long ago. It is real to me because I lived there a little while, maybe a minute, maybe an hour, but intensely.

— Fletcher Martin

Actually, every subject under the sun is worth painting. You shouldn't be put off by an object because it is familiar. Look what the great painters have done with the apple, for example. The important thing is what you do with the subject, how you express yourself.

— Dong Kingman

I say what I want to say in terms of ordinary people in everyday situations. And I find I can fit almost anything into that framework, even fairly big ideas — like freedom of speech or freedom of worship. Fine pictures can come out of ordinary human experience.

— Norman Rockwell

I like to paint forms in nature if they are exciting, but most of the time it is the urge to paint the things that I see with my mind's eye. I only go to nature to find out answers. It is a classroom, a place to study and to learn.

— Ben Stahl

Why not use everything available to you? You never know when you are going to need to work in a different medium to get the effect you want. And if you are stuck in one rut, you can't do it easily. That's why I think young artists should familiarize themselves with all the media available and experiment with them all.

— Al Parker

The artist has a special role in society. He is saying, in a sense, "Maybe we're walking too fast. I'm stopping for a moment to examine this experience." It is up to him to reveal things that other people might miss.

— Will Barnett

Loneliness, that's the story of my life. I think we grow when we are alone. I was once alone for thirteen days with two burros. There's a tremendous feeling of your insignificance under conditions like this. You put that into your pictures to give them significance, if you understand what I mean.

— Harold Von Schmidt



Now take off

You're all set now for your final assignment. It's going to ask more of you than any of the others, but you may find it the most fascinating of all. Give it your best, involve yourself, and let your talent soar.

**Famous Artists Course
for Talented Young People**

Stevan Dohanos
Robert Peak
Lorraine Fox
Will Barnet
Syd Solomon

33 1/3 R.P.M.

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Your final project

This is your last assignment, and it's a big one. It asks a lot of you, but out of it may come the best work you've done so far.

Pick a subject, or theme, and then use it as the basis for a final portfolio of work which you'll send to us. The principal requirement is that you be involved with your subject. What that is, of course, only you can say. It can be some aspect of art — experimenting with color to create mood, exploring line and tone for design purposes, etc. It may be a medium that you're very absorbed with right now — possibly oils or acrylic paint. You may be doing a lot of exciting work with print-making. Maybe it's a sport — surfing or boating, perhaps — or a special friend — or an animal. Whatever you choose, be sure you have a deep interest in it.

Suppose, for example, that you're crazy about horses. You love to ride. If you're really involved with horses, they'd make a fine subject.

You could tackle this subject in dozens of ways. If you're interested in design, you might want to try a series of posters

for a horse show. Or you could go to a race or horse show and make a number of fast sketches — do a whole reporting job from start to finish of the colorful event. You might want to capture in paint the grace of a horse in motion. Remember (Section 17) how other artists have conveyed movement in their art? A series of abstract paintings or drawings based on horses would be fun to do — so would a series of cartoons. There's no end to the possibilities of this subject — horses have been a popular subject in art since the days of the cave paintings.

That's only one subject suggestion out of a whole world of possibilities. Just ask yourself what interests *you*, what *you* are really involved in. Then begin to explore the ways you could use your subject as the theme for a portfolio of work (five to ten pictures) that would make up your final project for us. Don't take the easy way and settle for the first idea that pops into your head. Give this project some thought. Show us what you can do.

To send to the School

Section 18 assignment work

A portfolio of work — not less than five nor more than ten pictures. The exact number is up to you. These may be drawings or paintings, or both. Our only restriction is that your work fit comfortably into your mailing carton. Good luck!

"Find out what you really like if you can. Find out what is really important to you. Then sing your song. You will have something to sing about and your whole heart will be in the singing." *Robert Henri*

Cut along this line—and mail with your assignment

Section **18** Involvement—the vital ingredient

Comment sheet

In the space below, tell us about your final project. Explain why you chose the approach you did. Tell us how you went about working out your portfolio and whether you think it is successful as a body of work — and why. Give us as much information as you can about your work.

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Name Student number

Date

Print on the back of each piece of work:

Your name
Student number
Address
Assignment number

Check before mailing

Your assignment carton should contain:

- At least 5 pieces of work
- 1 comment sheet (on other side of this page)
- 1 shipping label filled out completely with your name and address

Mail this carton to:

Famous Artists School

Westport, Connecticut 06880

Note: Be *sure* your work is thoroughly dry before mailing.